GOLDEN BIRD

by JAMES OPPENHEIM

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GOLDEN BIRD

The Poetry of

JAMES OPPENHEIM

SONGS FOR THE NEW AGE

THE MYSTIC WARRIOR

WAR AND LAUGHTER

THE BOOK OF SELF

THE SOLITARY

GOLDEN BIRD

GOLDEN BIRD

By JAMES OPPENHEIM

NEW YORK ALFRED · A · KNOPF MCMXXIII

314430

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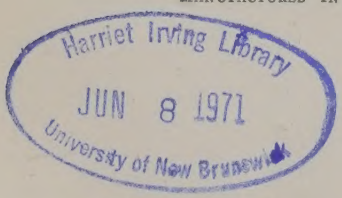
ALFRED A. KNOPF, INC.

Published, February, 1923

Set up and printed by the Vail-Ballou Co., Binghamton, N. Y.
Paper furnished by W. F. Etherington & Co., New York.
Bound by H. Wolff Estate, New York.

MANUFACTURED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA



To
GERTRUDE

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PART ONE

GOLDEN BIRD

I

NAUSICAA

IS it on a coast of my soul
That galleons out of Greece are beaching the beautiful gods
And Nausicaa is willowy on the seashore?

Why do you gaze seaward, sister draped in drifting blue?
Is the Wanderer gone, sailing the seas for home?
Your Wanderer, is he gone?

The white wave curls singing on the shore among the pebbles,
The white nymphs dance and sing: something about dark Helen,
Something about dark Helen . . .

Spell of Apollo brightens and burns my spirit . . .
O my soul, opening in the sunrise that is Greece,
Gone home singing to the star of beauty,
Where flesh is touched with the immortal wonder of calm divinities,
And Aphrodite is in the salt wave, shining, breaking . . .
Breaking, shining . . .

Why do you gaze seaward, sister wound in wavy blue?
Am I the Wanderer, and did we kiss last night in firelight among the pillars,
And did I steal away in the morning, sailing the seas for home?

I call you: 'Nausicaa' . . .
I call and call you in the sunrise: 'Nausicaa' . . .
The sea's blue is in my eyes,
And in my ears the song of the white nymphs: something about dark Helen,
Something about dark Helen . . .

Is it a galleon out of Greece that bears me to the land of Zion
And the dark rose of Sharon?
Have I left the beautiful sister in the sunrise to go home to the ancient Mother sitting in the lap of Night
Weeping among the willows where Babylon mocks her
And she remembers Zion?

She sits by the waters of rivers, my dark great Mother,
Calling the exiles home to her heart:
Mystery is her name, and Night, and terrible Jehovah:
She carries the storm of man, struggling with lightnings and thunders to the heights of glory . . .
Sunrise of Greece is a watery shaft in her whirling abyss . . .

And the Wanderer drifts in the middle of the seas, his oars idle, his sails furled,
Becalmed between sunrise and night, between Greece and Zion,
And he calls: 'Nausicaa,'
He calls and calls toward the sunrise: 'Nausicaa'
While the dark great Mother weeps in the core of his heart.

II

COMET

YOU have come on me like a head streaming fire in the November blackness,
Comet of madness and miracle,
Out of the Deeps, the Deeps beyond the stars . . .

They knew you, O dancer with the flaming scarf,
Spangling Assyrian midnight . . . cymbals clashed, anklets tinkled . . .
You burned with beauty into the souls of men . . .

The Nile knew you as you walked in the courts of your massive home,
O slender and large-eyed maiden,
A tiger at your right hand, and a leopard at your left . . .

In the houses of the prostitutes you sat in the dusk, listening to camel-bells,—
Dark Arabs came to devour your young body . . .

Were you not the prone Magdalen at the feet of Jesus,
And when you passed into healing was Jesus not you,
And you the clear-eyed Christ?

Maid of Orleans, I see you sitting your black charger,
In shining armour and pure of face . . .

Maid of Verona, I see you leaning to your lover in the
moon-knifed shadows . . .
Your long hair falls shining down your breasts and he climbs
to press his lips to the shining . . .

What garden have I seen you running in, a slip of a girl,
Shouting at play, and tossing plums at your fleeing brother?

Among the maskers, you leap and dance and you sing,
O light-footed!

And now you are tiger-woman, come to devour the souls of
men . . .
And now you curl weeping at your lover's feet, wrenched
through all your loveliness with despairing desire . . .

O baleful one, O beautiful, what are you, coming upon me like
a head streaming fire?
Comet, what are you?

Is it my soul, dripping monstrous and miraculous out of the
depths?
Is it thus souls are born?

III

WILD-ROSE

O THE wild rose!
Star of the pastures, sea-girl, sun-child,
Rose of the rocks!

Blue seas break in my heart and sun-waters drench the shores of my spirit . . .
You are gone, Great Mother of the Stars, Universe-Mother, you are gone . . .
The world is my sea-eyed Sister with the pale pink-petal'd cheeks . . .
Sea and headland and wind-lit woods are the beautiful maiden . . .
Wild-rose World, world of the sun-magic, world of the maddening body . . .

Wild-Rose, beloved, I am snared, I am taken in a net . . .
When was I not the slave of beauty,
When did I not fall down when the eyes of beauty transfixed me?

On coasts of moonlight the billows of the stars break into faint sparkles,
Night echoes the delicate star-boom from far lunar shores . . .
In the desert the tom-toms roll like the dust: death-peril glows: death grows sweet:

The young white dancer glides with her serpent: she is
naked in her glory . . .
And in my soul is the perfume of cool lilies-of-the-valley,
And in my soul the wild-rose opens, tear'd with dew . . .

Whence have you come in the darkness to be bound throbbing
and taut in my arms
Naked new young body hewed from the warm granite of God?
Whence is this passion and madness, breath of the Assyrian
desert,
African breath, tigress of night?

Wild-Rose, belovèd,
Wild-Rose twined with the deadly night-shade,
Wild-Rose where the cobra lurks.

IV

GOLDEN BIRD

YOU are not as other maidens,
Wild Rose,
Nor as the women whose darkness like a cloud enwombs the future . . .
No, you are not the mystery through which the children toil down from the Eternal,
Nor Earth of the mellow udders for the lips of babes . . .

Flesh goes through flesh in that procession which like the sun shines between two darknesses,
But where is your mortal mother, O Bird, O Golden, Golden Bird?
Rather your mother was the deep still pool where only the forest sings cradle-song, sings lullaby,
And where from mute waters you opened and spread the purity of your whiteness and your greenness
Over black passionate roots, Water-Lily, my Water-Lily.

In a strange way, from a strange place, sombre and eternal,
You came, dropped like moon-gold among the deep leaves,
Till the Cities of the Many Flesh found you with lifted face among the faces,
And the women turned to look at the slender stem upbearing the pure passion of that gazing glory,

Whose long hair robbed the moon,
Whose eyes had stolen from the sea . . .

Eternal Maiden among the mothers,
You are younger and older than the new babe and the ancient wisdoms,
Young as the lily petals white on the blue waters,
Old as the black roots fastened in Chaos . . .
Wild-rose, spirit of play, whimsy of the grey stones and the yellow mullein,
Sea-beaming sun-ray dancing among the pines,
Child that can never age so long as April keeps on returning,
Dark monstrous invisible glory behind the laughter and sparkle of your dalliance,
Goddesss as deep as Demeter in the wild-rose raiment . . .

You are not as other maidens,
Wild Rose,
No, nor as the mothers, the mothers of the Earth,
But you have come down to be Golden Bird leading rapt men into vision and victory,
Gathering them in, like a ghostly immaculate virgin, to a womb of the spirit
Wherefrom, reborn, they come with immortal youth.

She of Orleans was your sister in the shining of the days of the holy cathedrals,
She that led the dark poet up spirals of the skies through Paradise, was your sister,
She that drew the great soul of Faust upward and onward into heaven, was your sister,
Eternal Maiden, immortal Wild-Rose, everlasting Lily . . .

I have seen you touch with faint intoxication of the
Drink of the Gods, pale weighted spirits,
I have seen you splendid as one in armour leading the hosts of
the young to high invisible battles,
I have felt the hurricane in you, blasting the dead ways open
in the shatter of old cities,
I have tasted your storm, O Maiden, I have blown in your
rains,
I have crept into the chaos of your heart and drunk from the
black roots of rhapsodic song,
Till I came forth, arrayed in wonder . . .

You are not as other maidens,
Wild Rose,
You are not as the mothers, the mothers of the Earth . . .
You are Golden Bird, Golden Bird darting into the heavens
and singing as you go,
And I follow, I follow, my eyes forever lifted.

V

LILY-OF-THE-VALLEY

LILY-OF-THE-VALLEY
You have made some old moon-city fragrant, fragrant,
Till her still streets call with elusive perfume,
And her shadows twist, sanded golden through whimpering oleanders,
And one great echo of heaven breaks in silver splinters in the dreams of the sleepers of the city . . .

Now is the hour of the great desertion: refugee hour of lily-bright dreams . . .
The sea of the streets of the sun-city
Empties through windows and prison-bars of the moon-city . . .
Down empty pavements nothing is afoot save crime and love . . .

I am afoot, O window-gazer above the dreams and ghosts of the walled garden . . .
Silence from the encircling Shadow closes in upon my heels and is struck back, blow by blow.
Blow by blow my heart breaks silence, leaping toward your awaiting arms . . .

This is the wall: here grow your ramblers, and here your honeysuckle, and the night-greyed violets . . .

Clambering over, I have given my loaf to buy your hyacinths
for my soul . . .
'Miguet' I call, my feet in the dew, my hands on the
wistaria . . .

Lily-of-the-valley
You and the moon lean down,
And now this night moves by magic into that Night of the
Ages,
The Night of All-Lovers,
And the eternal summer of those moons which have kissed the
kisses of passionate young souls
Is ours . . .

Dreams and ghosts are crying a soundless song from the dead
centuries of loves stronger than death,
The Ages go laughing and weeping up and down the empty
streets,
And the Earth, a rich dust of lovers, opens and is the rose
that enfolds us in her heart forever . . .

We die into the rose . . .
Rose-flushed, the city hears song through its dream . . .
Impassioned, the white of the lily is the crimson of the
rose . . .

Clattering silver, the moonlight's a glamour-dance.

VI

BEAUTIFUL

NOW Golden Bird,
Sleepless for warbling,
Sits in the warm dark beneath my eyelids.

Golden Bird, Golden Bird, my soul,
When you were a maiden in the evening in the starlight,
And I brushed your lips with adoring,
The dark was like light about us,
Like gliding shuttles of golden light . . .

What could I do, Beautiful,
But take you deep in the folds of my ghost
Where you sang all night long?

O Golden Bird,
Sleepless for warbling,
You are sitting behind shut eyes in the warm dark.

VII

MUSIC

AND when I heard that voice
Which seemed like the ghost of a wisp of bemooned vapour,
Like the echo of the starlight,
Like twined laughter and yearning descending through a phantom of sorrow,
And which was love in pain before a god and a child in the belovèd's soul,
Then there was no other music for me, no, none other,
And my soul, shut from her soul forever, forever,
Must hunt forever the mystery where that music hides . . .

And when that song, like the drip of honey in a dream,
Is mine in a quick moment of shaken chance,
And I take the pang of it, and die toward her spirit, beating on the gates that are locked and sealed,
Then it ceases from the air, leaving the ache of silence,
And *eternal* desire . . .

VIII

MIRACLE

YOU are mine . . . you are mine . . . you are mine . . .
This is my fierce chant at night,
This is my savage cry.

Naked, you are mine,
And all in the sweet wonder of clothes, you are mine . . .
I take you with a rough tenderness: I own you:
I devour your beauty and your body and the wild lights of your star-soul . . .
You are woman, a man's morsel . . .

And you moan with delight to be enslaved, to be owned, to be devoured . . .
You pass into me, flame and incense of the ancient sacrifice,
You ascend in me, a wind of ashes and perfume for the nostrils of the god,
And out of death like shadow of fire your great ghost is reborn,
Your mother-ghost, where I sleepily lie, your child,
Very little, your child,
Your child at the breasts of love and life . . .

Then it is you who cry: 'You are mine' . . .
Then it is you who devour . . .

Then it is I that ascend and am born . . .
So the spirits of man and woman pass through each other in
the eternal renewal
Of love, the miracle, great love, the miracle.

IX

WONDER

LISTEN, dear Golden Bird . . .
When I was a tiny fellow, when I was nine years old,
Some wonder slipped from my spirit, and was lost, was lost . . .
But far-off on the Earth, O Golden Bird, you were born . . .

Long dark years were mine . . . dust of struggle and toil . . .
And I ran through the cities seeking, and looking at the beautiful faces . . .
Was this the wonder? was this? or was it a pine, a sea-wave,
Or was it a song, a star?

My music jangled in my throat, aching for the wonder,
The wonder of fairy-wing'd love, and the long blue-drifting golden-haired sea-girl,
Maiden eternal who brings a star up from the dark,
Wild morning-glory and evening-glow, O wonder, wonder, O wonder!

And at last, as I sang my 'Nevermore,'
Golden Bird, you came from the dark . . .
You came, and trouble was on me,
You came and I knew you not . . .
But Golden Bird, my Eve, knew the Adam from whence she sprang,
She knew it in a song of love . . .

Beating her futile wings against the bars of my jailed spirit,
She vanished in flight afar, and fell, and sickened, and almost
died . . .

But out of death, she came,
Yea, out of death, she came,
Out of her death and mine, and my heavens opened, and in a
long silence and slowness
I looked falteringly up, I looked and I slowly saw,
I saw and I knew . . . I knew and I found . . .
Found Golden Bird, found my soul,
O wonder, wonder, O wonder . . .

X

WINGÈD HEART

MY love is a wingèd heart . . .
O dark depths of my ghost whence, throbbing, she flies
Out and up to the heavens on the golden thread of my love . . .

My love is a wingèd heart . . .
And I draw in the golden thread, I draw it in quickly,
Lest she be flown, lest she be quite vanished . . .

My love is a wingèd heart . . .
Singing, she drops in my hands, and I put her warm in my
breast . . .
Surely I should die if she never returned.

XI

SLUMBER-SONG FOR MY LOVE

ARE you in my arms, my bird,
Are you here? are you here, in the hollow beside my cheek?
Slender Pocahontas was your great-great-grandmother,
The pines and the waters soothed her into slumber,
Soothed her, caressed her, and murmured her asleep . . .

Let *me* be the pines and the waters,
And the dark, the summer Earth,
Let me be caressing South-Wind
Starry and melodious . . .
Let me gather you, let me be your enfolding into a nest,
Let me be the waters where you slip to the dark and cease,
Cease from care and trouble, darling, and come to rest,
And come to rest . . .

Mystery, the moon-browed Mother, calls you in my spirit,
Calls you and you come . . .
Enter the dark and abide there until the dark grows light,
Until the dark grows lambent and melting golden about you,
And you lie in the garden where the night-birds sing,
And the great dream comes down,
And the great dream comes down . . .

Hush . . . and soothe . . . be quiet . . .
Cling close, content, content . . .
My love is warm about you . . .
Go drowsy, drift down drowsy on the bosom of the stream of Silence,
Silence, the full-brimmed river that moves to the shadow of the Sea,
Sea of slumber, of sleep . . .
Sleep . . . sleep . . .

XII

SECOND SLUMBER-SONG

FORGET yourself into a child,
And let me be the cradling arms
Of far away and long ago . . .
Lay away trouble and pain, lay them away,
Lay them on me, my own,
And give your soul into mine.

Come from many troubles into peace,
Come from tired travel into rest . . .
Float away on the waters of melodious mothering silence,
Down to the sea of sleep,
Down to the Deep of Dreams.

XIII

LOVE'S PROOF

THIS is love's proof:
That it is more wonderful to be together, than to be parted:
That distance does not touch each other with a glamour
Half so beautiful as the witchery of nearness:
That the hours together go all too soon, too soon:
That morning trips on the heels of evening, and the dark is juggled with the light:
That we never have time enough to say all the things that we must say:
That parting makes us aware of hunger and desire:
That the thousandth touch of lips has the fine intoxication of the first:
That we could watch each other forever in increasing astonishment of wide-eyed wonder:
That a faint music enspheres us and is never silent:
That we seem to dwell in the timeless and the world is an interruption:
That each seems so beyond the other, burning like a star of mystery,
The approach toward the other is toward something elusive and receding,
Something ever higher and further, remote, unattainable,
Needing a lifetime of seeking.

XIV

MADNESS

COME, let us take our breakfast in the city where the people dwell in darkness,
Let the brook-babble of a continuous musical laughter be soft between us,
Let us veil our eyes from each other and guard our lips,
Let us seem sane and practical in the wild morning-weather,
Let not the heaven of glory within us be manifest before the people,
Let them not see the sky where we soar together . . .
Lest we be taken, lest we be confined, lest we be put away,
Lest we be arrested for lunacy . . .

XV

DAYBREAK

FLING your lasso of light curling about our heads,
Morning-fire,
Smite with your spears of gold the pulse of our hearts,
Strike sun-up song from our souls, that arising with kisses
We become the crown of life,
A young garland of the Earth.

XVI

SUNWARD

MY belovèd is the prow of my spirit plunging through
the billowing blue of the morning,
There is a sea-song in our on-going, and a wind-song in our
sails:
Our sails are glittering wings, our ship is a bird rising from
the running seas,
We have a sky, we have a sky for soaring and singing,
Earth sparkles beneath us in September glory,
And near the sun we pour our golden love-song upon the
planet . . .

XVII

THE GOLDEN LOVE-SONG

LET now my soul
Ascend with the song of glorious love to the skies of the morning,
Let now my lark-soul, sun of the darkness, dawn toward the sun of the day,
Earth is too narrow: give me a sky to sing in:
Give me a sky for a golden love-song . . .

I arose from the bed of night and from the arms of my belovèd in the darkness:
I arose: I tasted resurrection:
The god, struggling in my breast, became a lark . . .
'This is what the Earth means,' I cried,
'Why our planet goes with singing down the sky-road of the stars.'

Then my young love leaped radiant to the kiss of the morning-shine,
She sparkled out of the waters of the bath; laughter of brooks was she,
Babble of pines was she . . .
She came with long hair of the seaweed colour running to wild tints of the russet-and-golden rocks,
Starred with her sea-blue eyes, sunned with her wild-rose cheeks . . .

My love was a young victory and our souls went singing together into the skies . . .
Lark-golden, lark-singing, into the morning skies . . .

You are beautiful, you are beautiful, my wild-rose love . . .
O my lark-soul, you are beautiful . . .
If I were a stone this morning, I should break into song,
If I were a massive mountain, I should snap my rock-foundations and dance upon the plains,
If I were a fixed star, I should leap a mad comet of music . . .

You are beautiful, you are beautiful, my wild-rose love . . .
Golden with the South are you,
Passionate with the South . . .
You strike through my dark North soul the wine-rays of delight . . .
You permeate me with a rhapsody of perfume and of bobolink-tunes and of petal-tints . . .
You smite me open singing into resurrection . . .
You have conquered me: I am in love . . .

In love: and I am wings now:
In love: and I am a song now . . .
I am a golden love-song which can never be blown into the magic of the throat's singing,
Which can only die into your heart, my beautiful,
Which can only sing into your soul, and yours alone, yours alone . . .
Yours alone in all the world.

XVIII

STAR OF MAIDENS

IF like your kinswoman of old,
If like that star of maidens, Pocahontas,
You found me, O my beloved, near to death,
Found me with my head laid on the stones, and the brute war-clubs raised above me,
Then, Golden Bird, I know that, never faltering, never trembling,
You, too, O Star of Maidens,
Would take my head into your arms and lay your lovely head on mine,
And save me from great death in the dark moment.

XIX

DIVINE CHILD

O MIRACLE of love—
I came clamorously conquering . . .
I conquered the God for love of whom I went a weakling,
For love of whom I crawled and crept,
Whose shelter and strong protection I craved . . .

Mighty monster, I conquered him. . . .

Lo, then, he appeared before me as a maiden,
Yea, as a Divine Child . . .

And now at last, I surrendered to love . . .
I stooped down and knelt: I cried, 'My soul, lead me, I follow' . . .
I cried: 'I that am above thee, thy conquerer, willing become thy slave' . . .

And I saw then how my Soul looked into the heart of the intolerable light of heaven,
And I looked in her eyes and saw glory by reflection.

XX

RESURRECTION

LIKE a golden storm
That has blown me bodily through eternal days
Love came, song-circled and star-windy . . .

But now?
I stand in the clear hard afternoon, and I am one
Remembering madness . . . searching the west for the gone glory . . .

Where am I now, alone?
And where is Golden Bird?
And where the abyss of vision, and the plighting, and immortal promises?
Where are those moments when death seemed conquered
And we dreamed our love everlasting?

O love, O love,
Is this all that thou art?
A lightning-opening of heavens, music flashed through the night, a cry, a sigh—nothing more?

I call you 'Golden Bird!'
I call and call you through the still afternoon: 'Golden Bird!

Wing back from the sky's shining and rain your melodious
madness on my parched spirit,
Make me insane again with lunatic love . . .'

O there is no joy in life, but to be mad . . .
To be beauty's slave, till the streets are a silver smoke
whisked down echoing alleys of chaos,
And we are angel and demon puffing on golden trumpets
among the dancing towers,
And the sea is a wash of gods, billowing shouts of immor-
tals . . .

When I was bewitched with the long wonder of your careless
hair,
When I laughed and wept like a waterfall among the thunder-
ing mountains,
When I knelt like a lost soul in the pit before my star in the
two-wing'd night,
When wizardry of a kiss brought hot flash of a reborn seraph,
Then I lived, then, drunken and divine, I shared with gods
Creation's infinite golden energy,
Creation's careless fling and scatter of scarf'd stars in
mighty night . . .

Magic of song!
Already the stupor and glory mount and sing in my blood,
And I think tonight
We shall eternize love,
Immortalizing the perishing . . .

XXI

BREATH OF THE DEEP

HOW wonderful is love,
And how wonderful, how wonderful,
How wonderful is the belov'd . . .

O my heart, melt in my body in that miracle by which blood turns into wine,
And the wine of passion becomes a music,
And the music *is* love . . .

Let me be an instrument, let me be a stringed instrument, a violin,
And let the god breathe on it, breath of the deeps, breath of those windy stars that dance with immortal feet where all is light,
That the song of my body enter the belov'd with divine pulsations . . .

XXII

STAR-DANCE

I HAVE been felled by beauty . . .
O the amazed wonder of my soul . . .
The wild-rose wonder, and wine-wonder, and moon-wonder . . .

I have been snared by a white body with pointed breasts and the curves that only water and song can echo . . .

The golden manacles of love on my wrists and ankles have given me freedom . . .

Fire-dance of wonder! Star-dance of joy!
Such is my beloved, such is my love . . .

XXIII

INDIAN SUMMER

AGAIN great song
Bubbles her stars in the pebbly spring of my
spirit . . .
And I am on my knees in praise
Because love, quick love, is leaping again
Like a babe, like a bird, like a brook . . .

The time of Indian Summer is here,
The hazy sun and the mellow air,
Yellow leaves that drink of the golden,
Drink of the glow of the dream-gold city . . .

For the city is a dream
That Golden Bird and I are dreaming . . .
We babble new songs in secret as we pass among the
people . . .
We laugh a secret laughter in the drifting Indian
Summer . . .
We are music-mad; we are lovers . . .

We walk in a sky-earth song . . .
O song that comes from a great distance,
Peoples unborn,
And dreams to be lived.

XXIV

IN AN OLD SQUARE

IN an old square, in an old city square
Autumn is passing through us,
And we are in love . . .

We are in love's deep passion, and sighing, we dream
The moon up, and the stars out, and the tree-tops into song.
We dream a city into being beyond the iron gratings,
An ancient moon-lamp'd city, maybe in Asia,
Where lovers kissed and Solomon sang . . .

We dream the mighty top of the tower piercing golden into the heaven
Where a pebble falls in that pool of sky
And circles of silver bell-ripples widen and run
Dropping a silver chime . . .

We dream our souls into each other
Under an oaken magic, by a low willow,
And leaves falling, and leaves falling . . .

And I say, 'Golden Bird,
In my arms you elude me, you escape and are gone, a spirit, a cloud, a star . . . '

And I say, 'Star of Maidens,
Your face is deathless among all mortal faces . . .'

And I say, whispering, with my arms binding you to my heart:
'You are all the women I have ever loved in one,
You are all the women men have ever loved in one,
Yet, miracles of miracles, you are you . . . '

XXV

THE DANCE-SONG

DANCE, my words!
Dance on my lips! dance in the air!
Dance, and make a dance-song, a dance-song for Golden Bird!

Golden Bird's a goose-girl, a pixy, an Ariel,
Golden Bird's a princess: she stepped right out of a fairy tale . . .
Golden Bird's the wood-cutter's daughter, asleep on maple leaves . . .

She walks in the woodlands dreaming: she is petals drifting: she is water flashing . . .
She is young Pocahontas, lithe Minnehaha . . .
She is very lovely, she is very lovely . . .

Delicate wonder and gauzy gossamer, soaked with sun, alighting fairily,
Tripping along, a music of hands, a music of feet, a music of eyes . . .
Golden Bird is a sea-eyed dream that plays in my heart with sunbeam feet . . .

Spirit! she is a spirit!
O the spirit of beauty itself,

Wild beauty, the fool's beauty that snares the sea with nets
of the sun,
Madman's beauty that lassoes the morning with loops on
mountains and light on leaves . . .
Golden Bird's the golden ball of fire and love that makes this
world
Beautiful, O beautiful,
Beautiful, O beautiful.

XXVI

THE ENEMY

WHEN that your beauty
Shines and is the opening of waters in the sunrise,
When that in my arms you begin to glow with a deathlessness
of glory,
My heart aches, my heart aches . . .

Death is my worst enemy: he is the black foe:
He is blind to the gazing of these beautiful eyes,
And deaf to the music of these lips,
He has no mercy for moon-gold hair,
And no pity for these delicate light hands . . .

Great must our passion be, to conquer him:
Great must our love be . . .
We must make the world blossom with the pure immortal
flame which is unalterable by darkness,
We must make Earth a song no storm may drown,
No wind may quiet . . .

XXVII

DEATH-SONG

AGAINST Death,
Warrior-girl, let us go, let us battle . . .
Against great Death, the foe, foe,
Let us wheel our battle-chariot wing'd with song's white horses
And charge the slants of the sky dashing against the dragon . . .

Veering we wheel, the blade of glory flashing,
And my young hair-streaming love is my charioteer in the heavens . . .
'Death unto Death,' she shouts, nerving me with unslayable daring . . .
Up against the monster we go, and a day and a night we battle . . .

Ho, we shall hack the horror
Till we topple the hairy spew to the wallow of hell,
Till the chant of our victory shivers into shatters the icicle stars crashing about us.

XXVIII

THE ATTEMPTED PORTRAIT

I PAINT your portrait:
I seize one of your beautiful moments:
I take you when you sit at the table before the mirror
And comb your hair and braid it and pin it up . . .

First it is all a rhapsody of colour,
Blue-and-rose silk, and green stockings, and black pumps,
And eyes of the sky-colour and hair of intermelting tints of tan and olive and chestnut running with gold,
And faint roses in the cheeks and along the lips,
But somehow all a drift of sea-blue and shell-pink,
Something of the wild rose,
Something not of night nor noon nor splendour of sunset,
But all of the sunrise . . .

Thus you are a vague intoxication: I must see you more sharply . . .

You are not tall, and yet you are so straight and so slender that you seem tall:
It seems first a boy's body, but it is eternally feminine with soft adorable beauty:
The gestures, the graceful and sure motions of hands and feet, the tilt and turn of the head,
The joy and sadness that startle each other across your face:

The delicate shadows and lights that fly and intermingle and
pass and seem essentially you:
The exquisite perfumes, the art of your subtle clothes:
Your voice's music ranging from scarce-heard syllables of sighed
delight
To clear treble of laughing narrative and defiant notes of
assertion and anger:
The Southern accent, words that rise like the foot of a toe-
dancer and come lightly down on the tip:
Your soft and fleeting touch, hands that caress like passing
gossamer:
That something all about you that makes me think of a sing-
ing bird,
That makes me think always of England's lark.

I still miss you: you are too changeable:
I have seen you when you looked like an Elizabethan page,
And I have seen you when you were smart and dashing and
would cut a figure galloping on a horse:
And I have seen you demure in veil and lace and scarf, like
some antebellum maiden of the South . . .
And there are young moments, when you are the wide-eyed
smiling child,
And old moments of haggard cheeks and thin drawn lips and
miserable eyes . . .
And drugged moments, the trance of passion,
And brilliant moments, the flash of intellect . . .

No painter could paint you: he would have to use magic
words as well as line and colour,
And fill a whole gallery with portraits,
And then set it all to music . . .
He could not see you, unless he loved you,

And if he loved you he would confront the unsearchable
mysteries
And go dumb and maimed and blind . . .

No: I can only get glimpses of your soul; I see your soul
forever with the body a mere wavering of light and
shadow,
Cloud and mist and sparkle and changing colour . . .
See! I have quite lost you sitting there at the table, braiding
your hair . . .
Your body is only the language of your soul,
Its speech, its music, the way your soul has of speaking to
mine . . .

XXIX

BIRDS OF OUR JOY

BIRDS of our joy,
Irradiate, irradiate upward,
Upward opening like the fan of the sunrise till the sky is a burst
Of birds,
A storm of song . . .

Wing higher,
Wing and wheel,
Dew-scatterers,
Sparkle-flingers!

O heavy with the night of sorrow,
My white-faced, my pale love,
Gather your moon-remembering hair in a glory about your head,
And put on the shining of your silks,
And turn and find me: *my love, my love, I love you forever . . .*

I love you forever . . . hear our wild birds bursting the gray twilight with the song-sun:
Hear my heart beating its refluent passion against the softness of your breasts:

My lips kiss the tear-memories that haunt the shadows of
your eyes:
Droop no more, garland of my love, I kneel before you,
I bury my face in your hands and my soul in your soul . . .

Sunrise mightily, splendidly, windily sweeps
Heaven clear of star-tears, earth clear of dew-tears . . .
Old Age is bundled away to blue-veiled Eternity . . .
Sorrow is dragged by the heels and flung in a canyon,
And somewhere our wet wild-rose is opening its petals on a
gray rock
Where the sea booms and the foam flies and the golden oriole
sings . . .

And I love you forever . . .
Bird of my joy and song-maker in the leafy boughs of my
heart . . .
I love you: *I love you*: O what can I sing but this,
Clasping you in my arms, drinking the beauty of your lips,
While we glow out into the singing sunrise, while we glow
out,
The immortal lovers, the deathlessly in love.

XXX

THE SINGER

GOLDEN Bird—
One of the mightiest of seraphs
Stood by my side in the dark hour.

And he said:
The path of air of the singing bird is not for a mortal . . .
On that path one is blown into stellar storms and nebulous cyclone . . .
One is not a man, but a voice,
Not a soul, but a music . . .

Take then the path of earth,
Of common things, of daily burdens, of human loves . . .
That is the path to immortality . . .
On that path man passes beyond the earth and beyond death
Into completion . . .

I heard the seraph . . .
I weighed the penalty . . .
And Golden Bird, I heard a note from your throat dropping in a crimson twilight,
And what was death then and mortality,
And what incompletion?

I come, Golden Bird,
And shall follow you till my eyes darken and my heart stops,
And nothing goes on of me but a deathless music.

PART TWO

HEBREWS

HEBREWS

(*To be chanted thunderously*)

I COME of a mighty race . . . I come of a very mighty race . . .
Adam was a mighty man, and Noah a captain of the moving waters,
Moses was a stern and splendid king, yea, so was Moses . . .
Give me more songs like David's to shake my throat to the pit of the belly,
And let me roll in the Isaiah thunder . . .

Ho! the mightiest of our young men was born under a star in the midwinter . . .
His name is written on the sun and it is frosted on the moon . . .
Earth breathes him like an eternal spring; he is a second sky over the Earth.

Mighty race! mighty race!—my flesh, my flesh
Is a cup of song,
Is a well in Asia . . .
I go about with a dark heart where the Ages sit in a divine thunder . . .
My blood is cymbal-clashed and the anklets of the dancers tinkle there . . .
Harp and psaltery, harp and psaltery make drunk my spirit . . .

I am of the terrible people, I am of the strange Hebrews . . .

Amongst the swarms fixed like the rooted stars, my folk is a
streaming Comet,
Comet out of the Asian tiger-blackness,
The Wanderer of Eternity, the eternal Wandering Jew . . .

Ho! we have turned against the mightiest of our young men
And in that denial we have taken on the Christ,
And the two thieves beside the Christ,
And the Magdalen at the feet of the Christ,
And the Judas with thirty silver pieces selling the Christ,
And our twenty centuries in Europe have the shape of a Cross
On which we have hung in disaster and glory. . . .

Mighty race! mighty race!—my flesh, my flesh
Is a cup of song,
Is a well in Asia.

PART THREE

THE GREAT MOTHER

FIRST

WAR

WAS it by night the riders told me 'There is War'?
Was it in the night the riders of news babbled their tales of battle?

Was it then that the heavens opened upon me and I saw the snaky and bloody face of a gargoyle God
Leering through heavens of thunder,
That I heard the Harpy of the universe, screeching, with long-nailed fingers before her chin,
Yea, whistling like great shells that shall blast blood?

Night, were you not a vomit then, bursting out the four skies with the belch of chaos,
Till I cowered in downpour of filth and horror?
Did I not flee Divinity as one flees madness?
Did I not seek to escape being a man?

Where was the dream of my youth which saw a world of singing cities and of garden homes,
A world in Christ and of comrades in Christ?
What was man, O what was I myself, as I had known him?

Was it true that human beings were tearing each other's flesh to the death, with laughter for anguish,
While the world was a shambles in thunder?

Was it so, this frenzy of cannibals whose guns devoured great hosts
And whose teeth ripped souls for pleasure?

Were the seas blood flooding Europe till whole peoples went floating and bobbing with groans and curses?

Yea, is this man, I asked, yea, is this the dreamer of dreams?
Is this he who climbed from the darkness toward the high vision of heavenly love?
Have I not heard songs which filled the skies with the beat of the wings of seraphs?
Have I not participated in mysteries of homely miracle where tenderness murmured in a low voice
And heard women chanting lullabies to tired children?

There were waters of Babylon where exiles wept and were comforted,
There were blue dark seas for the longing of Iphigenia,
There was a moon-lit garden of Verona, and lagoons of Venice . . .
Weep, ye Italian poplars, where John Keats lies buried,
Thrill, ye seraphs of song, requiem for Beethoven . . .

But it was in the night the riders told me, 'There is War,'
But it was in the night the riders of news babbled their tales of battle . . .

Yea, then I knew, yea, then in my heart I knew,
And it was revealed to us all, what man is . . .
Yea, then I saw in him that monster of eternity with snaky tresses
Leering through heavens of thunder,

I perceived in him the Night that was a weltering vomit and a river of vermin,
I saw in him the Abyss which we carry in our whited bodies . . .
I saw Man, the Stupendous, the Abominable, the Unutterable,
Mystery, Creation . . .

It is because the World is Demon-God in the rages of struggle,
And because Man has issued from Demon-God to be man,
That our glory is rocked in the arms of Terror . . .
Yea, behold the animals, they fight one another, yet theirs is quiet and is peace,
But our adversary is God, but our battle is with the omnipotent;
We must wrest our souls from the clutches of eternal Might;
We must win to ourselves from the Harpy of the Universe . . .
Lo, if we evade the battle, lo, if we turn our faces to greeds and desires,
We are swallowed down, even people by people, into the bowels of the God,
And in madness turn from conquering God to slaying each other . . .

Was it by night the riders told me, 'There is War'?
Was it in the night the riders of news babbled their tales of battle?

SECOND

DEVIL-SONG

A SONG for man:
A song for the breaker of the wild Horse who clatters across the bridge of the Milky Way at midnight:
A song for the universe-wrestler, star-rider, the wing'd with dreams . . .

Star-stuccoed, the monstrous magnificent Ghost in things sends suns roaring out of his mouth to whistle in the belly of the pit:
An image of him and his eternity is in the brain of a man:
Man is Satan, born of the Lord to conquer the Lord . . .

We walk in hiding sunlight or wrap us in darkness . . .
There are ten dimes in a dollar, H^2O is water, stiff collars wilt in summer;
A woman's body is soft and cool under the body of a man;
Yet the wrapping of darkness falls off in sleep and drops us in the abyss of dreams . . .

I saw in dreams in visions of the night, I saw . . .
We dwell in nebulous hinterlands, nethermost fires, coasts of time . . .
Our Ghost is one gigantic shadow darkening the Galaxy like an eclipse of God . . .

Tears falling from a woman's eyes on her dead lover are little things
But the curse on death in her heart is a mighty thing . . .

God is like the last of a storm that shrinks away before the despairing courage of humanity . . .
We have battled him a million years, and are only beginning . . .
We live to fight him, and there is no fight for greatness and glory like the fight with God . . .

When we go to war with each other, he is the enemy . . .
When we wrest power from the entrails of mountains, he is the foe . . .
My song is snatched from the splendour of his heart, I steal from the abyss with gladness:
We have eaten of his Trees and thieved his wisdom and filched his medicines . . .

My brother, the beast, lay down in the bath of God's glory and has been obedient like the rolling of the Earth . . .
So my brother the beast is a dark beast forever . . .
But you and I and our hardy little mothers and fathers
Were rebels in Cosmos, we snatched a little self from the nebulous floods,
We broke ourselves in two and spiked ourselves with agony,
And began an endless Armageddon against God . . .

Every song that floats from the lips of man or wails from his violin,
Every high soul that is starlike in our darkness,
Every vision that gets into marble and steel and raucous engine,
Everything that makes Earth throb with a human radiance in the brainless glare of the suns,

Is sign of a triumph over the Lord, a glorious victory . . .

Ye hosts of Satan that go into death with your hands on the
trigger of your daring,
Ye have made man the eternal revolutionary,
The never-to-be-downed defier of Jehovah . . .
Ye have left in our souls the unquenchable resistance to things
dead and things done and the soft bed of the past,
Ye have left in us creators and the valience of the future,
The never satisfied, the endless vision, the gambling greatness.

THIRD

ABYSS

IS man only a bloody flesh
With the stitching needles of passion and thinking flashing in and out,
A mouth, a phallus, a hand,
Ambition, despair—no more?

Alas, and glory, we are the Abyss, we are the Abyss;
We can climb down the interior mountain walls of a torn and bottomless canyon
And in that brown sunless and starless shadow with the smoky torch of the Ego
Picked chasmed glooms out with our thin rays
Revealing coasts and rings of Valhallas and chanting Heavens,
Terraces of Hell populated with the damned of a million years,
Terrains of divine animals moving in the dawn of time . . .

We walk a narrow strip all our days between Madness and Sanity . . .
Move but a little to the left and we start a swarm of Furies and Harpies,
And are driven into waters where the tiger-fish lies mightier than Leviathan
And are gulped down deep as Dis in the eternal belly . . .

In fear of the Lord we ice over the top of the Pit,
We lay a floor of the ice of complete forgetfulness,
The frozen waters of the turning away of our eyes and our ears to our many neighbours and our feeble tasks:
And we skate in a fearful oblivion of the Eternal on the rind of ourselves . . .

'There is no God,' says the fool,
And, 'There is no Devil,' says the imbecile . . .
Down in that smithy and matrix-mill the swarthy monsters of Creation
Are smelting and puddling and rolling and hammering the living future,
Preparing great dooms for peoples,
Shaping gigantic new Gods for groping nations,
Brewing blind revolutions and earthquakes of change . . .

Lo, when the preparations bulge toward the daylight of the act
Sledgehammers of God come shattering through the ice,
And peoples and nations tumble into the madness of themselves,
And there is famine and pestilence and fury and war,
And the vast slaying of the Old,
And in slaughter and tumult we work the will of Creation . . .

The great only are beforehanded with the Lord,
Unterrified and with Promethean daring they descend willingly,
With the faint smoky torch they pick black paths toward abysmal Mystery,
Until they are closed in utterly,
Until they lie down in darkness, as dead;

And they are mixed with the stuff of divinities and demons,
They are streaked and layered and infibred with prophecy
and power and wisdom,
They steal and drink and endure the eternal fires,
And fighting right and left with a terrible courage they
bear back to earth
Loot of creation in song, story and prophecy,
And in many inventions. . . .

And the greatest are they who go down like Dante for a
journey of years
And single-handed fight and conquer the Eternal,
In proof that man is the equal of the Gods,
And that he can battle with the Omnipotent until he wrests
from immortal hands a soul of his own,
Reborn, the conqueror, hope of our ages . . .

He who conquers comes into the last wisdom:
Lo, the divine immensity of life itself wills the creation of
human souls,
But has no power to give that birth save as man himself
conquers it . . .
The Eternal goads us to battle with the Eternal,
The Gods coerce Man to fight the Gods,
As if only that which is won through terror and struggle is
worth the winning . . .
As if Creation grew only by the clash and war in itself . . .

FOURTH

THE GREAT MOTHER

THE Great Mother: an abomination and glory:
A mystery . . .

I lived with the Great Mother for seven long years . . .
I searched her womb and consumed her everlasting body . . .
I rode her, my white mare, down the roads of dream . . .

In horror and ecstasy I wandered in her great ghost,
Till this world floated phantom-like and I peered out through the mist of the mother, white-faced, at a people who were symbols,
And hills and streets that were signs . . .

She took my strength from me: she bled me white:
She cast decay on my youth and made the rapids of my laughter a tinkling trickle . . .
I was enervated: I was listless: I was in love with drowning:
The days of my youth were over . . .

O whore of Babylon, that the ancients sang of,
City of Fornication and Abominations,
Incestuous Lorelei-alluring Mother!

And I rose like one from the grave and fought her . . .
But she was many . . .
She was a city, a host, a people, a heaven of stars . . .

What did the ancient one say?
I became a stallion, she became a mare,
I became a bull, she became a cow,
I became a nymph, she a god,
I the adored Virgin, she my Son,
I was a Serpent, and she a maiden,
I the Devil, she my concubine . . .
For every appearance in which I clothed myself she took on the opposite appearance . . .
I surrendered or I fought: it was all one . . .

My soul went glimmering in the abyss of her ghost . . .
She had swallowed me down, a hot mouthful, and I lay in her belly . . .
When the horror was deepest on me she appeared before me as the one beautiful,
The one adored and beloved . . .
She struck me with her hoof like Pegasus and song gushed like a fountain from the trampled earth of my soul . . .
She was unconquerable because she was within me and yet I within her . . .
And because her phantoms walked out of me and clothed men and women with her likeness,
And I was dragged to these men and women by the phantoms that left me . . .
And so living women became the mare to my stallion, the nymph to my satyr, the mother to my son . . .
And so I fought a helpless and hopeless battle with these women,
As though they were a city and a host and a people and the heaven of stars and moons and suns . . .

Great Mother who has been called by all wonderful and terrible names . . .

Universe, she is called, and Nirvana, and Satan,
The Great Snake that coils about the heavens and the earth and the heart of a child,
Leviathan and Monster of the Deep, Jehovah, God . . .
Her name is Wisdom, her name is Saviour, her name is Christ . . .

A man is lost who enters into God who is a city whose gates may never be taken . . .
Yet a man is great who enters into God and is lifted into the cosmic and eternal battle between man and God . . .
He who conquers God shall overcome and be crowned with power and peace . . .
The conquered God becomes the comrade of a man . . .
Universe-wisdom mates with his . . .
He shall have the Mother for wife . . .

How shall one conquer the never-to-be-overcome?
How shall a man tame the universe?
How ride astride the mare whose feet are in the east and the west beyond the stars?

A strange way: a mystery . . .
It is a terrible and a fatal word that whispers through his soul . . .
'Renunciation! renunciation!'
He knew that word whose arms were stretched on wood and his hands nailed through,
And whose body sagged on the straight beam . . .
Save that ye cease from love of the Mother,
Save that ye cease from the great love that makes you the child of the Mother,
Cease from desire to be in that womb,

Cease from longing for the horror and glory, the abomination
and mystery,
Cease from the wish to be God by piercing God,
Ye shall not conquer her . . .

Ye must be willing to be born and be naked and be nothing
but a human man,
Little and of no account, swinging no more in abysses where
stars drop like cinders,
Done with the sweats of ecstasy and the dung of horror,
That, severed from her, she may now go at your side, perfect
in beauty and glory . . .

She is conquered by your cleavage from her,
She is yours, because you are no longer hers,
She is subdued to equality because you choose to be
solitary . . .
She has no strength on them who do not desire her . . .
Her abominations cease, because they were the offspring of
your own wishes . . .

She becomes forever beautiful and strange to you . . .
Jerusalem shining like a star on the hills of heaven.

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